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SUBJECT: HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN KENYA'S NORTHEASTERN PROVINCE

REFS: NAIROBI 05074

Summary

1. Persistent drought and underdevelopment in Kenya's Northeastern Province continues to erode humanitarian indicators. Erratic rainfall during the Sept-Nov short rains season has failed to replenish natural water points or pasture causing degradation of local livestock, the main source of food and livelihood security for the province's mainly pastoralist population. Conditions are likely to deteriorate until April 2006 when the next seasonal rains are scheduled. Current international and Government of Kenya (GOK) relief measures may be overwhelmed as beneficiary numbers continue to increase; and the situation could become acute if the April rains are delayed or fail.
End Summary.

Background

2. From January 3-10, a USAID team from the Offices of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and Food for Peace (FFP) conducted a rapid assessment in the Wajir and Mandera Districts of Kenya's Northeastern Province. The objective was to verify humanitarian conditions, confirm current response planning, and identify assistance gaps.

3. On January 1, Kenya's President Kibaki declared a national drought emergency and appealed for international assistance totaling \$153 million for food and non-food support. The plight in the Northeastern Province was highlighted by the President and local media as Kenya's worst affected area, and the drought blamed for the death of 40 children and scores of animals.

4. The Northeastern Province has been under drought emergency since August 2004, and the current problems are the most recent in a series of droughts since 1991. The mostly nomadic ethnic Somali population relies on livestock for food security and livelihoods. The area borders with Somalia /Ethiopia, and has a history of insecurity.

5. The region is chronically food insecure and underdeveloped. An August UNICEF nutritional survey cited several causes beside a lack of rainfall for widespread emergency malnutrition rates; including the population's lack of access to health services, poor education, and the lack of livelihood diversification.

Current Situation

6. Erratic rains have failed to recharge natural water points and pasture to levels sufficient to accommodate the numbers of local livestock. FEWSNET reports that rainfall during the short rain season (Sept-Dec) was 60 percent below average in the Northeastern Province. Natural water pans and rivers are completely dry and there was little green vegetation.

7. All GOK boreholes (52 total) in Wajir and Mandera Districts are operational, and currently running on a 24/7 basis. There was high convergence of people and animals at the boreholes visited. Arid Lands (GOK drought monitoring office) is providing borehole generators with 50 percent of the diesel fuel required, and relying on already stretched local contributions for the balance. The Ministry of Water has established emergency borehole repair teams to respond to mechanical breakdowns. GOK planning is to drill 22 new boreholes in the two districts.

8. GOK water trucks are distributing to communities far

from the existing boreholes. There are 10 tankers operating in the two districts and the target is to deliver an average of 20 liters of water per day to approximately 35,000 families. Families commonly use recycled veg. oil jugs of 1 liter capacity to store water, and are now lining up on roadsides waiting for delivery.

9. The Provincial health infrastructure is struggling with increasing numbers of malnourished children. Global Acute Malnutrition rates in the districts were assessed to be between 18 percent - 28 percent (August 2005 UNICEF survey). District hospitals are currently not overwhelmed with malnutrition cases; however, administrators report a 5 fold increase in admissions over the last two months. The suspicion is that malnutrition in remote areas is going undetected and untreated.

10. Additional problems for the hospitals include a lack of qualified manpower, shortage of supplies and inexperience with malnutrition treatment protocols. International NGOs previously engaged in supplemental and therapeutic feeding activities have mostly closed following improvements after the July long rain season.

11. Doctors in Wajir and El Wak complained about a shortage of basic medicines. Increased demand for drugs due to the drought has not been met with increased supply from the government central pharmacies. There was no report of cholera, measles or sharp increases in communicable or water borne disease. Provincial immunization rates (60 percent) are below the national average.

12. The World Food Program is distributing general rations to 209,000 people (31 percent of the population) and has been active since the original drought declaration in August 2004. Arid Lands officials now believe that 428,000 people (66 percent of the population) will require a full ration for the next six months. The GOK, following recent media criticism, has pledged to supply food to meet the gap with respect to general food distributions, and there are reports of government food already arriving in both districts. However, a recent news report of GOK relief food being sold in the market raises questions about the viability of the GOK's distribution and targeting mechanisms.

13. Arid Land estimates that 40 percent of the local livestock has perished over the last two months. District officials feel that the lack of pasture is killing animals, as water was relatively available at the boreholes. While dozens of carcasses are visible in the northeast, the vast majority affected is cattle.

14. The Kenyan Red Cross has begun purchasing distressed cattle (Off-take) in Wajir and Mandera, although there was no evidence that the meat from these animals is being used by drought affected families. Pastoralists have been accused by government of having more animals than the land can support. District Officials reported that many animals have migrated to the neighboring Eastern Province for pasture.

Regional Affects

15. Drought affected pastoralists from neighboring Ethiopia and Somalia are coming to Kenya in search of relief aid. The El Wak District Officer reported that 300 Somali families had recently arrived and an unknown number of Ethiopian pastoralists are in northern Mandera District.

16. CARE, working in the Gedo region of Somalia, report that the Juba River is the only water source across the border, and insecurity and lack of rains has left all existing water points and bore holes either dry or inoperative. USAID is coordinating a humanitarian response with other actors in drought-affected areas of Somalia and Ethiopia.

USG Response in Northeastern Province

17. The Office of Food for Peace contributes approximately 36 percent of the WFP resources distributed in the Province. USAID/OFDA, through partner CARE, began rehabilitation of pastoral water points in September and supports immunization programs through UNICEF. USAID Kenya supports a provincial livestock development program.

NGOs and other Donors

18. International NGOs operational in the Province include CARE (OFDA Partner), OXFAM and Action Against

Hunger. Current interventions include general food distributions, water support and nutrition. World Vision has a small development activity in Wajir, but no plans to respond to the emergency situation. UNICEF has managed emergency nutrition in both districts through partner agencies.

19. ECHO has earmarked Euro 2 million for water and protection programming in Mandera District through NGOs CARE and Action Against Hunger. DFID recently contributed \$750,000 to UNICEF for the purchase of commodities for the national nutritional program.

Conclusion / Recommendations

20. Humanitarian indicators are likely to deteriorate until the next seasonal rains arrive in April 2006. Current response mechanisms for the food and water sectors are stretched and likely to become overwhelmed if the April 2006 rains are delayed or fail; and if significant numbers of drought affected from Somalia and Ethiopia migrate to the Province for assistance.

21. Continuation and availability of a general food ration is critical to sustain populations until the April rains. The success of any emergency nutritional interventions directly depends on the prevalence of food in the general population. Arid Land's proposal to almost triple recipients of general food rations will require new resources from either the international community or GOK.

22. Emergency nutritional capacity (supplemental and therapeutic feeding) and mobile screening needs to be strengthened. The Provincial health infrastructure lacks the resources and skills to effectively manage an increasing caseload of malnourished children, pregnant and lactating women and the elderly. UNICEF is currently the best partner option, and has the capacity to coordinate implementers, information flow, and ensure feeding protocols. Activities may need to run through August 2006.

23. The continued operation of existing boreholes is critical until the arrival of the April rains. The GOK belief that local communities can continue contribute 50 percent of the fuel and maintenance needed is optimistic. Support could be needed for diesel fuel and generator spare parts to ensure the wells continue to produce. The provision of hygienic gerry cans and chlorinated water treatment kits will improve household storage capacity and reduce exposure to water bourn diseases. The trucking of water could be considered if GOK promises to maintain the distributions fail.

24. The supply of basic drugs needs to be monitored. An increase in demand due to the drought is not being met by GOK central pharmacies. Should drugs and supplies continue to be inadequate, UNICEF has the capacity to distribute WHO health kits and provide additional support to district health centers.

25. The recommendations above are for short term life saving purposes and will not resolve the perennial drought problems in the province. Greater investment in health services, infrastructure, education and livelihood diversification is needed if permanent improvements are to be realized. USAID will continue to closely monitor the Northeastern Province at both the Nairobi and field level and provide input to long term planning efforts.

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